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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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BRYCE YOKOMIZO
Director



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May 11, 2005

TO: Each Supervisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bryce Yokomizo', written over the 'TO:' line.

FROM: Bryce Yokomizo, Director

**SUBJECT: REPORT ON CalWORKs HOMELESS FAMILIES
(BOARD ORDER #3 – JANUARY 4, 2005)**

This is to follow up on my March 9, 2005 interim response to your Board's request that DPSS analyze the characteristics and circumstances of CalWORKs homeless families and implement strategies to address these families' needs.

Based on your Board's request, DPSS, in collaboration with the Chief Administrative Office's Service Integration Branch, developed two approaches for analyzing the population. The first was a study of administrative data from cases aided during the period of September through November 2004. CalWORKs families were identified as homeless, not homeless, or at risk of homelessness. The second was a participant survey completed by 373 CalWORKs participants who requested CalWORKs homeless benefits during the week of February 22 through February 28, 2005. The survey was designed to provide supplemental information to more fully understand the reasons behind homelessness and the barriers to permanent housing.

This memo provides an analysis of the administrative and survey data. The full study, CalWORKs Homeless Families, is attached for your review.

The following are significant findings from the study, including the administrative data and participant survey:

- Of the 177,000 CalWORKs cases included in the administrative data, there was an indicator of homelessness for about 13,000 (7%) families.
- The Second District contains the largest CalWORKs caseload (36% of the countywide caseload) and the largest number of CalWORKs homeless families (44% of the countywide total).

- A greater proportion of homeless adults were exempt from welfare-to-work activities (i.e., the GAIN program) as compared to non-homeless adults. This is because homeless parents tended to have much younger children than non-homeless families, qualifying them for a GAIN exemption. Consequently, there was lower participation in GAIN by homeless families than non-homeless families.
- Homeless participants used mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence services more than non-homeless participants.
- The analysis showed that sanctions and time limits are not factors that set homeless families apart from those who are non-homeless. Specifically, the proportion of sanctioned homeless adults was only one half of that of non-homeless adults. Also, the data suggests that there is no link between reaching time limits and subsequently becoming homeless.
- A lack of education did not distinguish homeless families from non-homeless families. Also, the average income of both homeless and non-homeless families was very similar, indicating that circumstances, rather than income, appear to distinguish homeless families from non-homeless families.
- Most survey respondents shared that this episode of homelessness was their first: nearly 85% indicated they had been homeless only once in the last 12 months. This indicates that homelessness among families tends to be episodic and not chronic.
- Most respondents indicated they were homeless as a result of an argument ending in them leaving their prior residence. Also, unemployment was another prevalent reason for homelessness.
- According to the survey respondents, the primary barrier to ending homelessness was the affordability of housing, followed by unemployment.
- Most respondents indicated they were able and wanted to work, but needed training, education, child care and transportation.

Based on the full study, all the previously planned intervention strategies shared with your Board in March are still appropriate. Later this month, I will be providing your Board with a status report on all of the intervention strategies implemented since January 2005, including the extent to which funding is available to sustain these strategies beyond this fiscal year.

BY:jms

Attachments

c: Chief Administrative Office
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors

Key Points

Highlights of Report



"To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service"

Why DPSS Did This Study

On January 4 2005, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors requested that DPSS provide more information on homeless CalWORKs families. This report presents findings from analyses of CalWORKs Program caseload data supplemented with response data from a survey of homeless families.

How The Study Was Designed

DPSS worked with the Chief Administrative Office's Service Integration Branch to analyze administrative data on CalWORKs Homeless Families. The investigation focused on caseload characteristics of 177,200 cases between September and November 2004 comparing homeless families with families not identified as homeless in the administrative data available. Criteria to identify homelessness included the following:

- Issuance of aid from any of four special assistance programs for homelessness during this three-month period; *or*
- Utilization of a DPSS office or homeless shelter as the residential mailing address.

To gather important information about homelessness missing from administrative data, such as duration of homelessness and reasons for losing permanent housing, DPSS workers administered a 30-item survey to 373 CalWORKs participants who requested an issuance from any homeless service during the week of February 22 through February 28, 2005. The survey was a modified version of the instrument utilized by LAHSA for its forthcoming report on homelessness.

This report was prepared by:
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Halil Toros, PhD & Farhad Mehrtash,
& Manuel Moreno, PhD
Chief Administrative Office

May 2005

CalWORKs Homeless Families

What DPSS Found

From Administrative Data

- ▶ Seven percent of cases (12,973) and persons (44,751) met criteria for homelessness.
- ▶ The Second District had the greatest number of homeless families.
- ▶ The declaration of need for or use of Specialized Supportive Services between December 2002 and November 2004 amongst homeless was more than two times greater than that of non-homeless families.
- ▶ Compared to non-homeless families, homeless families declared a greater need for all types of Specialized Supportive Services between December 2002 and November 2004.
- ▶ A lack of education did not distinguish homeless families from non-homeless families.
- ▶ African-American and Hispanic adults headed the majority of homeless families.
- ▶ A single parent headed most homeless families. Two parents headed less than 10% of homeless families.
- ▶ Homeless parents had much younger children relative to non-homeless parents; more than half of homeless adults had children five years of age or younger.
- ▶ The rate of cycling in and out of the CalWORKs Program was significantly higher (28%) for homeless families as compared to non-homeless families (16%).
- ▶ The proportion of currently sanctioned among non-homeless adults (21%) is nearly double that of homeless adults (11%).
- ▶ A greater proportion of homeless adults were exempt from GAIN activities as compared to non-homeless adults.
- ▶ Cash-eligible adults meeting the criteria to identify homelessness had lower GAIN Program participation rates than non-homeless adults.
- ▶ Between December 2002 and November 2004, homeless adults had on average, shorter durations of employment than non-homeless adults.
- ▶ Between December 2002 and November 2004, the average monthly and quarterly aid and total income (earned income + unearned income + cash aid) was nearly identical across non-homeless and homeless families.
- ▶ The data does not support a link between timing-out of CalWORKs and homelessness.

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From Survey Data

- ▶ *Lancaster and Southwest Family DPSS office locations had the greatest number of applications for homeless services.*
- ▶ *Although ages ranged from 18 to 64 years, the average of 30 years suggests a mostly young group of respondents.*
- ▶ *Women comprised the greater part of the sample.*
- ▶ *A greater number of African Americans applied for homeless assistance than other racial or ethnic groups.*
- ▶ *The majority of respondents had low levels of education and many did not have a high school diploma.*
- ▶ *None of the respondents had military experience, a physical disability that limited mobility, or a developmental disability.*
- ▶ *Less than 10% of respondents had a disability that kept them from working.*
- ▶ *Less than 15% had experience in foster care.*
- ▶ *About 70% reported living as a single adult with children.*
- ▶ *The number of children living with a parent/caretaker ranged from one child (40%) to nine children (0.2%).*
- ▶ *Approximately 55% of parents reported having a child four years-of-age or younger.*
- ▶ *Approximately 35% of parents reported having a child aged 5-10 years.*
- ▶ *Approximately 22% of parents reported having a child aged 11-14 years.*
- ▶ *Approximately 14% of parents reported having a child aged 15-18 years.*
- ▶ *About 65% of families reported that their school-age child was attending school in late February. Some of the remaining students may have been "off track" because their schools operated on a year-round calendar.*
- ▶ *For most respondents, this episode of homelessness was their first.*
- ▶ *About half of respondents reported a spell of homelessness that was short – less than 30 days.*
- ▶ *About 20% of respondents told DPSS that they had been turned away from a shelter or transitional housing in the past month.*
- ▶ *An argument and request to leave was the most frequent reason given for current homelessness.*
- ▶ *Transitional housing served as the temporary home for most respondents.*
- ▶ *Many who applied for homeless services had recently left a rental home or apartment that was not government subsidized.*
- ▶ *Affordability was the most frequent barrier to permanent housing.*
- ▶ *The great majority of respondents were unemployed.*
- ▶ *No child care topped the list of reasons for unemployment.*
- ▶ *Nearly 70% reported that their cash aid was not reduced in the past six months.*
- ▶ *The bulk of respondents said they had no other source of income.*
- ▶ *Private doctors and public health clinics were used most frequently for medical attention.*
- ▶ *Nearly half of respondents had not used the emergency room for any medical treatment in the past year.*
- ▶ *Few respondents reported using services/assistance such as emergency shelters or free meals or counseling.*
- ▶ *There were multiple indicators of psychological distress amongst respondents. Depression was reported by about a third of the sample.*